

[I talked with old Mr. Richmond again today]

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F. Donovan, Thomaston

Friday, Nov. 11 '38 I talked with old Mr Richmond again today. He is a great admirer—to [put?] it mildly, of Aaron Thomas, and is full of stories about the old [man?].

"I forgot to tell you," said he, "about the time Aaron caught the help looking out the windows. I forget what was goin' on—some kind of parade or somethin' I s'Bose—and old Aaron he come along outside the shop this day, and there was all the help at the windows—not a durned one working' mind you—lookin' out at whatever was goin' on.

"Aaron got boilin' mad when he saw them, and he goes in and he calls the foremen together and he asks them what's the idee, can 't they keep the help [to?] work?

"Somebody says, 'Well, you know how 'tis, Mr. Thomas, when the's a parade or somethin'—they just won't stay at the benches.'"

"Well,s' says Aaron, 'by gollies we'll see whether they will or not.,' he says. So he calls Hen Wilcott, the old one armed painter, and he says, 'Hen, go down to the Case shop and paint all those windows white that're facin' the street.'"

"All right," says Hen, and he goes down to paint 'em. He got the work done all in one day, too, and old Aaron came by the next day and looked 'em over and he was satisfied.

"But that day hen got a call from one of the foreman—one of the windows was busted, so he had to go down and fix it—put in a new pane. He got another one that afternoon and another the next morning, and two the day after that.

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"So he went to Mr Thomas and said, 'Those white painted windows seem to be hoodooed, some way or 'nother—they just won't stay in.'

"How's that ?' says Aaron. 2 Don't know,' says Hen. 'They been breakin' right and 1 left. Springs keep breakin' and hittin' the panes—the work just seems to fly outin the boys' hands. Never see nothing like it.'"

Old Aaron didn't say nothin' for a while. Then he says to Hen, 'Msy-be paintin' those panes wasn't such a good idea. P'rhaps you better scrape 'em and we'll see what happens.'"

"Well sir, never a one got busted after that.

"Nother time I remember Aaron scared the life out of Hen. It used to be a kind of storm signal when Aaron a eyebrows went down. When he put on that frown that showed he was gettin' mad. The' used to be a lot of kiddin' back and forth among the boys about Aaron's eyebrows.

"Hen strolled into the office once and old Aaron was there, but he was kind of bent down lookin' at some files and Hen didn't see him. Levi Parsons worked in the office, and Levi says to Hen: 'Well, Mr. Wilcott, what can we do for you?'

"Oh, nothin'" says Hen; "I Just came in to see if the old man's eyebrows was hangin' down.' When old Aaron heard that he straightened right up and glared at Hen.

"Well, be they?' he says. Hen didn't answer a word, just dusted out of that office as fast as his feet would carry him."

"Aaron had the biggest funeral I ever [seen?] in this town. At ten o'clock that morning he was buried, all the help from the factories—every Man, that is—went around and stood in front of his house—you couldn't get Within 500 yards of it. They all marched six abreast,

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behind the cortege and to the cemetery, to see the old man laid away. I guess there was at least 500 of him.

“They thought a lot of him because he thought a lot of them. When the panic was on—the company had about 90,000 of those old Nutmeg alarms over at the Marine Shop and about 30,000 more in the storehouse—they got caught with all those on their hands. Seth E., in 3 New York, he was all for closing the place down tight. But Aaron said no, [he?] was going to keep shop open if he only had a dozen workin', thought it would have a demoralizin' effect if he closed. So he kept some workin' right along, had 'em on two days a week.

“Business started pickin' up in August, and Seth Thomas went on 40 hours a week. Over at Ingraham's in Bristol, they was workin' until none o'clock nights, and on top of that they got a standin' order from some jobber for 20,000 clocks a month. They couldn't take care of it, so they recommended Seth Thomas.

“They called Aaron to ask him if he could handle it. Says he “ ‘I'll have the first shipment on the train tomorrow morning.’ And it was, and in three months they'd worked off the whole order of 120,000.”

[Antone?] Scheebel—German-employed by Seth Thomas for 46 years. Center street. Mr. Scheebel is another of the old German clockmakers. His father in Germany employed several persons at the craft, though Scheebel did not learn the rudiments of the trade, strangely enough, until he came to this country.

“I wanted to work at something there was more money in,” said he; “so I became a chainsmith in the old country and worked at it for a few years. When my brother over here, he wrote and told me to come to Thomaston, said he'd send me the money, so I ended up as a clockmaker after all.

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"My father used to make the old wooden movements—I wish I had one now—he had his own business in the Black Forrest. Twelve or fifteen people worked for him, right in our house. Sometimes I had to file counter pinions, or paint clocks or do repair work, but I never learned much about the trade, though I worked for a while in a clock factory in Furtwangen too.

"I had relatives here, as I say, and so did my wife, so we were glad of the chance to come here and live. William T Woodruff was president of the concern when I came to work, and I can tell you a story about him.

"He was a dressy sort of man, took considerable pride in his appearance. Each day he'd come to work with a carnation in his buttonhole. There was a fellow working there then named Sullivan who used to be on friendly terms with Woodruff—the only one in the shop that was—as far as I know, and he was greatly taken with a suit the old man used to wear.

"So he went to the house one day and he said to Mrs. Woodruff, 'the boss said for you to give me that suit he's been wearing to the shop every day.' She gave it to him without question, and I imagine Mr. Woodruff was a greatly surprised man when he came home and found it missing. No, I don't think he ever said anything to Sullivan. Maybe he thought it was a good joke, or maybe he was too proud to make a fuss over it.

"I worked in the turning room most of the time. It was all hand-turned work and pretty though, let me tell you. I spent as much as four hours turning one piece—a part for an escape wheel for a tower clock. I got a box here sample work—spindles, sockets, collets, center pinions, all sizes and all lengths—let me show you."

"Mr/Scheebel brought out his samples—and this is an instance of the pride these old fellows took in their work for these particular parts in themselves are of no earthly use to him and he obviously cherished them for sentimental reasons. He showed me several

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which he described as being particularly difficult pieces of work and spoke disparagingly of the spindles and pinions turned out today, many of them done by automatic machines.